New York Times

— NEW YORK, MONDAY, JULY 17, 1978 —

25 cents beyond 50-mile zone from New York
Higher in air delivery

Inquiries Link Informer for F.B.I. To Major Klan Terrorism in '60's

By HOWELL RAINES
Special to The New York Times

ATLANTA, July 16 — Renewed investigations into the activities of Gary Thomas Rowe Jr., the Federal Bureau of Investigation's chief paid informer in the Ku Klux Klan, have produced a portrait of Mr. Rowe as a man who "loved violence" and who could be linked to most major incidents of Klan terrorism that occurred in Alabama while he was on the bureau's payroll.

While receiving F.B.I. money, Mr. Rowe, by his own account, was directly involved in racial violence beginning with the assault on the Freedom Riders in Birmingham, Ala., in 1961 and extending to the shooting of Viola G. Liuzzo, a participant in the Selma-to-Montgomery march in 1965.

Federal pay records introduced in a trial at which Mr. Rowe testified 13 years ago showed that the bureau paid him over $12,000 from 1960 to 1965 for undercover activities that are now the subject of a Justice Department inquiry. He has also said that the F.B.I. gave him $10,000 more to finance his relocation under a new name.

The Justice Department's formal inquiry will seek to determine if Mr. Rowe, who has made many conflicting statements about his activities while on the F.B.I. payroll, functioned as an agent provocateur in the Klan, helping to plan and carry out the violence he was paid to monitor.

The inquiry was ordered last week following reports in The New York Times that the Alabama authorities, in their re-

Continued on Page A12, Column 3

newed investigation of the racial killings of the 1960's, had found information linking Mr. Rowe to the 1963 bombing that killed four black children at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.

The Times also reported that Alabama investigative files showed that he told a state investigator that he killed a black man in a race riot in Birmingham in 1963 and was told to keep quiet about it by his F.B.I. "control" agent. The agent has denied the charge.

The Justice Department inquiry, ordered at the request of two members of the Senate committee that is drafting a new legislative charter for the F.B.I., will also seek to determine if agents in Alabama condoned and helped cover up violence by Mr. Rowe.

Investigators for both the state of Alabama and the Birmingham Police Department have concluded that Mr. Rowe probably helped provoke violent acts by other Klansmen.

"Rowe was a guy who loved violence," said a detective who interrogated him for more than six hours last fall.

Question of Condoning

But city and state investigators are at odds over whether the F.B.I. condoned such behavior. Birmingham detectives take the harsher view of the Federal role, perhaps because of Mr. Rowe's allegations that the Birmingham Police Department had many Klan sympathizers in its ranks.

"The files are full of people telling the F.B.I., 'Check Rowe, check Rowe, check Rowe,'" said a detective who has seen some bureau field reports on Mr. Rowe's activities. "But I've never seen anything in the files showing that they checked him."

Such disputes aside, it is possible at this point to draw together accounts of Mr. Rowe's financial dealings with the bureau and of his activities in the Klan, which he joined in 1960, apparently at the urging of the F.B.I.

Sources for these accounts include previously ignored court documents, his public and preliminary testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Operations in 1975, his book about his adventures in the Klan and, most importantly, information developed in the recent investigations by Birmingham and Alabama authorities.

In the trial of the Liuzzo case in 1965, the F.B.I. confirmed that it had paid Mr. Rowe $6,971.50 for information and $5,404.27 for expenses over a five-year period.

$10,000 Reported Delivered

He has also told a Senate investigator that Federal agents promised him an additional $30,000 to $50,000, but actually delivered only $10,000 in cash after he testified against the three Birmingham Klansmen accused of killing Mrs. Liuzzo.

In a statement to a lawyer for the Senate intelligence committee, he said that an F.B.I. agent had told him that the $10,000 was being paid on behalf of J. Edgar Hoover, then the bureau director. He said that the agent said the money reflected Mr. Hoover's view that Mr. Rowe was the best undercover agent "we've ever seen."

Mr. Rowe's statement about receiving $10,000 could not be confirmed or denied immediately by the F.B.I., nor did it rule out the possibility that the money could have come from other sources in the Government.

James L. McGovern, the former agent said by Mr. Rowe to have mentioned the $30,000 to $50,000 figure, said yesterday that he did discuss "relocation" money with Mr. Rowe, but never in such large amounts.

Payments Usually Lower

Mr. McGovern said such payments usually were "considerably lower" than the figures used by Mr. Rowe. However,

the bureau is reported to have paid $25,000 to the informer who led agents to the graves of three civil rights workers murdered in Mississippi in 1964.

Neither Mr. Rowe, who lives at an undisclosed location under a new identity assumed with the help of the F.B.I., nor his attorney could be reached to comment on payments to him or on the racial incidents in which he was involved.

The first major incident of racial violence to which Mr. Rowe has been linked was the Mother's Day beating of Freedom Riders at two Birmingham bus stations on May 15, 1961, about a year after he joined the Klan. He has told a Senate investigator that a photograph showing him beating a black bus passenger led to the first effort by Federal agents to cover up his violent activity, according to a document of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

He asserted sthat his control agent instructed him that even if Mr. Hoover asked whether he was the man in the picture, "You're going to look at him straight in the eye, and say 'No, sir, that's not me.' "

Found Him Reliable Member

A former Klansman who was with him that day said in an interview recently that Mr. Rowe's behavior at the bus station established him in the Klan as a reliable and "true-blue" member of the Klan "action squads." The former Klansman, who asked not to be named, said Mr. Rowe personally directed the white mob to shift from the Greyhound to the Trailways station to intercept the first busload of civil rights activists.

"I can hear him now, saying, 'Come on, come on, we're going to be late. They're going to be there before we get there,' " said the former Klansman. "He was the commando. That's how he got those other boys to follow him."

In his book and Senate testimony, Mr. Rowe claimed an active role in the Freedom Rider incident as liaison between the Klan and the Birmingham police in devising a plan whereby Klansmen would be allowed ample time to beat the Freedom Riders before the police moved in.

Among the other incidents to which Mr. Rowe has been linked are the following:

¶The transporting of guns to Tuscaloosa, Ala., in June 1963, when Gov. George C. Wallace was preparing to make his "stand in the schoolhouse door" at the University of Alabama. Mr. Rowe, who had then been on the F.B.I. payroll for over three years, was arrested along with several Klansmen later identified by Alabama law enforcement sources as suspects in racial bombings.

¶The fire-bombing of the home of A.G. Gaston, a black millionaire. In interviews with Alabama authorities and in his book, "My Undercover Years With the Ku Klux Klan," Mr. Rowe told in detail about an unsuccessful foray he and other Klansmen made against the Gaston residence. Investigative documents show, however, that he failed a lie-detector test in which he denied involvement in a fire-bombing that "actually damaged" the Gaston home.

¶The bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church on Sept. 15, 1963. In reopening the investigation into the deaths of four children there, the Alabama authorities reached Mr. Rowe in the hope that he could help them. But investigative files show that he failed a polygraph test about his own involvement in the incident. As a result, key investigators said that he was suspected of having been with Robert E. Chambliss, the 74-year-old Klansman convicted of murder in the case last November.

¶A double bombing in a black neighborhood on Sept. 25, 1963. The investigative files show that Mr. Rowe also failed a lie-detector test in which he denied direct involvement in planting these bombs, the second of which contained shrapnel. It was apparently intended to maim spectators drawn to the area by the first explosion. Investigative records indicate that Mr. Rowe was spotted by the Birmingham police in a telephone booth four blocks away at the time of the twin explosions.

¶The 1965 shooting of Mrs. Liuzzo on Highway 80 between Montgomery and Selma. Mr. Rowe's testimony helped convict three Klansmen of conspiring to violate Mrs. Liuzzo's civil rights by killing her on the night after the march. In court, he testified that he was in the car that chased Mrs. Liuzzo's automobile. He said he only pretended to shoot at her, however, leaving the killing to his companions.

Statements to Police Cited

Investigative files in Alabama contain statements from police officers who contended that Mr. Rowe had made incriminating statements about his own involvement in that killing. And ABC Television recently broadcast a polygraph test that indicated that he gave deceptive answers when he denied a role in the killing.

A Senate intelligence committee document that came to light last week added still another confusing footnote to the Liuzzo case.

In 1975, Mr. Rowe told a committee lawyer that a black man was killed along with Mrs. Liuzzo and that government lawyers, including John Doar, then the Deputy Attorney General, forced Mr. Rowe to mold his testimony to fit the case the Government wanted to present.

Yesterday, Mr. McGovern confirmed one aspect of Mr. Rowe's account of his feud with Mr. Doar. Mr. McGovern said he recalled hearing that Mr. Rowe did tell investigators that Leroy Motan, a key prosecution witness, was not the black man Mr. Rowe saw in the car with Mrs. Liuzzo. According to the Senate document, Mr. Rowe said that Mr. Doar forced him to keep quiet about his misgivings about Mr. Motan's identity. Mr. Doar, reached at his law office in New York Thursday, refused to comment on Mr. Rowe's allegations.

May Be Attempt at Immunity

Mr. Rowe's description of shooting a black man in 1963 came to light unexpectedly while he was being questioned last fall about the church bombing. Alabama investigators' files contained speculation that he might have brought up a previously undisclosed shooting in an effort to win immunity for all capital offenses, should he agree to return to Alabama to testify in the church bombing case.

Birmingham detectives have since found reports that Mr. Rowe boasted to a fellow Klansman and another man in 1963 that he had shot rioting blacks. A Birmingham police officer has also recalled seeing Mr. Rowe in a riot zone with a pistol tucked in his belt. However, city investigators have not yet found a specific unsolved killing that fits the circumstances described by Mr. Rowe.

Investigative sources indicated that it was possible that a racial killing in Birmingham in 1963 could have gone unrecorded or have been covered up in some other way.

In his public testimony before the intelligence committee in 1975, Mr. Rowe insisted that the F.B.I. had approved his participation in violence. The bureau gave the committee a memo from of April 1964 in which Mr. Rowe was ordered to give up leadership of a Klan "action squad."

"Nevertheless," the committee's final report stated, "even those instructions did not extend to ruling out Rowe's participation in violence, but rather only leading or directing violent acts. The essential characteristic of Rowe's status was expressed by the following testimony of his F.B.I. handling agent: 'If he happened to be with some Klansmen and they decided to do something, he couldn't be an angel and be a good informant.' "